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[www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com)

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### Welcome from Pyramid Australia's Clinical Director, Sophie Kerr

Welcome to our first newsletter. Pyramid Educational Consultants of Australia has had a busy start to 2010. Not only have workshops been presented in Australia, New Zealand and in Hong Kong, but we are currently undergoing some big changes. Our Managing Director, Amanda Reed, has moved to the USA to take up a position as International Director of Development for the Pyramid Group Management Services Corporation. I have taken on the role of Clinical Director and will continue presenting workshops and providing consultative services throughout Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia. Our new consultant, Rebecca Wright, started her position at our January intensive. See her article on the PECS Intensive Program on page four for more. Rebecca has been providing consultations in both our Newport and Highett clinics since January and will be presenting workshops from this month. As always our operations team, Erin Hobbin (Operations Director), Narelle Cullen and Nicolette Waschl are available to assist with information, workshop/consult bookings and product orders.

We would love to include content from our readers in our next issue. If you have photos, PECS success stories or magic moments that you would like to share please contact our office.

### Featured Product for May

#### New - Tabbed Standard Insert Page Dividers



The Standard (Large) Insert Page Dividers are made of thick, durable polyvinyl. Each page measures 21.5cm x 16.5cm. The pages are sold in a set of six, include an assortment of colours and have a uniquely located colour-coded tab for easy page turning. Velcro® sold separately.

Also available are our original Extra Standard (Large) Insert Pages (without tabs), which are sold in sets of five please see Extra Standard (Large) Insert Pages in the online store.

Our new Tabbed Standard Insert Pages can be purchased online by clicking below:

[Australian Online Store](#)  
[New Zealand Online Store](#)

## Newsletter - Issue 01: May 2010

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Pyramid Educational Consultants of Australia welcomes  
**Rebecca Wright, BSpPath** to the Clinical Team.

Rebecca is available for consultations at both the Newport and Highett Clinics, and via telephone or webcam.

Rebecca has worked as a speech pathologist since 1999. Following her secondary education in Bendigo, Victoria, she graduated with a Bachelor of Speech Pathology from LaTrobe University, in Melbourne, Victoria. In 1999, Rebecca returned to Bendigo for her first job with the Department of Education and Training (DET). From this time, Rebecca has continued to work for the Department of Education in various capacities. In 2000, Rebecca relocated to the Mornington Peninsula where she continued to provide speech pathology services to numerous primary and secondary schools. Since 2002, Rebecca has worked at a dual mode specialist school (i.e. special school and special developmental school combined), with students aged between 5 and 18 years who have various disabilities. Rebecca's role in this setting has been varied, but has predominantly focused on developing and implementing communication programs, curriculum and policy development and professional development.

In 2004, while continuing to work in education, Rebecca also commenced her own private practice on the Mornington Peninsula focusing on providing services to pre-school aged children and their families. Rebecca continued to combine her work in education and private practice until mid 2008, at which time she and her family moved to Ireland for 18 months. While in Ireland, Rebecca worked for the Health Service Executive as part of a multi-disciplinary team which provided services to children with a disability from the ages of 0 to 18 years.

In 2008, just prior to leaving Australia for Ireland, Rebecca attended a PECS Basic workshop in Melbourne. Since this time Rebecca has implemented PECS in her clinical work with numerous individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities.

We would love to hear from you! - Please send in stories, photos or comments you would like to share in future newsletters.

**Email to: [ncullen@pecs.com](mailto:ncullen@pecs.com), or  
Mail to: 3/1 Basil Street, Newport, VIC 3015**

If you have any questions, or would like to provide feedback about our new newsletter, please contact Erin Hobbin at [ehobbin@pecs.com](mailto:ehobbin@pecs.com), or on 03 9391 6122

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### Amanda Reed's relocation to the USA

Amanda Reed, Director of Pyramid Australia, has recently relocated to the USA where she has taken on the full-time role of International Director of Development for the Pyramid Group Management Services Corporation. In this role, Amanda will be working closely with colleagues to develop companies, products and services around the world, and to revise and update the current activities of the Pyramid group of companies. Amanda has settled into her new apartment in Delaware with her Min-Pin puppy, Inca.

Not long after her arrival in the USA, Amanda participated in the Fourth Annual Delaware Walk for Autism at Bellevue State Park in Wilmington, a fundraiser for autism services in Delaware as part of Autism Awareness Month. The main service for autism in the state is the Delaware Autistic Program, where PECS started when Andy Bondy was Director of the program and Lori Frost a speech-language pathologist. The walk was attended by local Pyramid staff and the day was enjoyed by all.

Amanda is enjoying her time in Delaware and her new professional challenges, although she says "I miss everyone back in Australia, but am really looking forward to making PECS and Pyramid available to more people around the world".

Pyramid Australia wishes Amanda the greatest success in her new role and we look forward to her next visit home.



### FaHCSIA - Helping Children with Autism Package

Our Pyramid consultants have been very busy seeing many new and continuing clients since we have become an approved member of the Helping Children with Autism provider panel.

Some new services that we have introduced, including web cam and telephone consultation, have proven to be very beneficial to those families who are unable to bring their child into our Newport or Hihett clinics. Our consultants have also seen numerous children at their homes, schools and kindergartens while in their state.

Many families have used their funding to attend workshops and purchase products, while others have shown a great interest in our PECS Intensive Program. For further information on the services that Pyramid offer under the HCWA package, please contact Erin Hobbin [ehobbin@pecs.com](mailto:ehobbin@pecs.com) or visit our [FaHCSIA Provider Info](http://www.pecs.com) page at [www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com).

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### PECS Intensive Program - January, 2010 *Rebecca Wright*

As my first day at Pyramid Australia approached, I wasn't sure what to expect but was very excited all the same. As it happened, my first day was also the first day of our January PECS Intensive Program.

Four PECS users attended each day for a week. For 6 hours per day, the participants were provided opportunities to develop their PECS skills during functional activities across the day. During play, snack, lunch, circle and outside time, each of the participants used PECS to make requests and comments (at his/her individual level). With each of the participants completing an average of approximately 80 exchanges per day, there were many opportunities to consolidate developing skills and begin to master new skills. At the end of each day, the data collected was analysed, so the program could be tailored to meet the needs of each individual child.

For many of the participants the early part of the week was an opportunity to "fix" any bad habits that had developed. The second part of the week really focused on extending each individual's skills through subsequent phases of the PECS protocol, students also learn other critical skills such as, "Let's make a deal", respond to "wait" and following functional directions. By the last day, all of the participants had progressed significantly through the PECS protocol, with many of the parents reporting changes in the way their child was communicating at home throughout the week. Overall it was a fabulous week for the participants, their families, and us.

The PECS Intensive programs are run in school holiday times. Our next scheduled PECS Intensive Program in July is booked out, but we currently have vacancies for the September Program. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer for an intensive program should contact Erin Hobbin on 03 9391 6122 or [ehobbin@pecs.com](mailto:ehobbin@pecs.com) for further information.

Further information on the PECS Intensive program can be found at [www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com) under the [Consultation & Services](#) tab. For those with access to FaHCSIA funding, please contact Erin Hobbin to discuss how your funding can cover the cost of the week long program.

### Upcoming PECS Intensive Programs

**July 5th to 9th, 2010:** This Intensive Program is now fully booked

**September 27th to October 1st, 2010:** Limited places still available

**January 10th to 14th, 2011:** Places available

Please contact Erin Hobbin at [ehobbin@pecs.com](mailto:ehobbin@pecs.com) or on  
03 9391 6122 to register your interest.

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### High-tech, Lo-tech or No-tech?

The world of Augmentative and Alternative Communication systems is in a constant state of flux. The most recent additions to this ever expanding set of tools are the iPod/iPhone apps. Some apps focus on building sentences to be shown to a listener, others function as speech generating devices (SGD). The question for parents then becomes 'What is the best option for my child?' And some of you may be asking 'In a world of high and low tech gadgets, where does PECS, now categorised as a 'no-tech' system, fit in?'

The development of PECS began in 1985. In the 25 years since this time, numerous research papers have concluded that PECS and the protocols used to teach it are effective. PECS truly is an evidence-based system, with proven outcomes. Using PECS has improved communication skills, increased independence and decreased inappropriate behaviours in students of all ages across the world. Many students who use PECS eventually transition to using speech as their primary mode of communication. When this is the case, investment in a high-tech device may not be warranted until other options have been explored.

For those considering use of high and low tech devices individuals must consider, weight, size, transportability, battery life, button size, voice output options, vocabulary size, communicative functions, cost and more. The beauty of the iPod/iPhone system is that it provides a light weight, transportable, low-cost option. With the development of applications like Grace App and Proloquo2go, it is clear that personalising the system is possible with some technical know-how. However, as with any communication system, there are a range of other issues to consider.

One of the clear advantages of PECS is that with no batteries or microchips, charging and breakdowns are not a consideration. It is often recommended that PECS is the starting point for students who will eventually transition to using a SGD. Beginning with PECS allows students to learn about communication more quickly, as the pre-requisite skills are far fewer. When this is the case, students will have the ability to develop a functional communication more quickly. For students who have learned PECS prior to SGD use, they also have ready access to a communication system if their high-tech device breaks down or runs out of charge.

Setting up a no-tech communication system like PECS is often far easier than setting up a high-tech device. One of the most important considerations when providing a communication system is how quickly the student will be able to use it. If the lead in includes having to program or modify a device, the student may have an extended period without a functional communication system. In addition, a pre-requisite to using this type of picture point system is that the student can discriminate pictures. This again increases the time until the student is able to functionally communicate.

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### Hi-tech, Lo-tech or No-tech? **continued from page five....**

When considering a communication system always think back to the definition of communication. Communication involves approaching a communication partner and delivering a message. While it is possible to teach both of these skills using high-tech devices (most effectively done through the use of techniques from the PECS protocol), it is often easier to teach these skills using a no-tech system like PECS. With no voice output, the PECS user must approach their communication partner to deliver their message, thus ensuring the skill of social approach is required.

On the whole, whether choosing a no-tech, low-tech or high-tech communication system, it is essential that communication systems are customised to best suit the individual student. When doing so, always consider what is being taught and how it will be taught. The Pyramid Approach to Education and PECS protocol provide a strong base for teaching any communication system. A focus on no-tech systems can provide a functional communication system with very little lead in. Consider starting with a no-tech system and transitioning to a high-tech system if the individual does not develop speech. This will also allow time for the newest editions to high-tech communication systems to be further developed and made more user friendly.

### Upcoming Workshops

To register and pay for our workshops online, please visit our [Training](#) page at [www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com). You can also register for our workshops by downloading a registration form from our [Forms & Applications](#) page, and sending it in to the Pyramid office by fax, mail or email.

|           |  |                   |
|-----------|--|-------------------|
| Adelaide  | PECS Basic Training                            | 11th & 12th June  |
| Darwin*   | PECS Basic Training                            | 14th & 15th June  |
| Darwin*   | SoSafe! Workshop                               | 16th July, 2010   |
| Perth     | PECS Basic Training                            | 27th & 28th July  |
| Melbourne | PECS Basic Training                            | 2nd & 3rd August  |
| Melbourne | PECS Advanced Training                         | 9th & 10th August |
| Adelaide  | Teaching Communication Skills for Independence | 14th August       |
| Adelaide  | SoSafe! Workshop                               | 15th August       |